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The Honorable Amanda Price
Chair
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Hello. My name is Julie Durham and I am the director of research at the Michigan Association of Public School Academies. Thank you Chairwoman Price for the opportunity to share our concerns about the Michigan Department of Education's most recent ESEA waiver.

Let me share a few terms with you today:

AYP
Top To Bottom
Accountability Score Card
Focus School
Reward School
Priority School
Red Designation
Annual Measurable Objectives
Student Growth Percentiles

What do all of these things have in common? For starters, they all provide information to someone, whether it is a school, a parent, or a superintendent, as to the accomplishments a school is making in any given year. Hopefully they provide incentives for schools to improve their capacity to serve kids. They also have something else in common. They are accountability measures that have proven to be moving targets for schools and educators since their inception.

We prefer a system that isn't a moving target, a system that we aren't piece meal and patching together over time with annual changes, and a system that reflects the true and authentic learning of students.

No Child Left Behind goals had a site on 2014. By last year, all students were supposed to be proficient in reading and math. Michigan was not alone in determining that this challenge would be hard to meet, and the result was ESEA waivers around the country. MEAP 3rd grade reading proficiency rates have hovered around 60% since 2007. These annual measurable objectives have been pushed back, reduced, and punted, and now the current waiver aspires to 85% proficiency by 2023-24.

Something about the system isn't working, and the waiver isn't going to help. Michigan currently has at least 3 different accountability systems: the Top to Bottom List, Priority and Focus school identification, and Accountability Scorecards. Chairwoman Price, at Spring Lake Public Schools, in your own district, all of the schools have a Top to Bottom ranking above 80th, and 3 above the 90th percentile. Third grade reading proficiencies are above 90%. These schools collectively rank as a "Yellow." Middle of the pack, average. I don't know about you, but these measures create confusion for me, and I live in education data every day. Imagine the confusion for parents, teachers and leaders. That is why MAPSA has been advocating for a simplified A-F accountability system, similar to what is being used in many states around the country.

We prefer and aspire to an accountability system that is easier for schools and parents to understand. A system that allows schools to know where they stand without a psychometrician to calculate unknown measures to get a score or grade.

In the proposed waiver, consequential accountability decisions would be made on a three-year cycle. In the last year of the cycle, schools are rated a priority, focus, or reward school if they meet the requirements for each category in the final two years of the cycle. For some reason, the first year doesn't factor in accountability decisions. Theoretically, a school could be in the bottom 5% for 2 years in a row, then be in the 6th percentile in the 3rd year, and not be considered a priority school. Or a school could plummet in their location on the top to bottom list for three years, and only in the third year be below 5%. These schools would not be priority schools. Using the most recent TTB data to illustrate, over 32,000 children are enrolled in such schools.

While, it is useful and beneficial to schools to use more than one year of data to determine accountability outcomes, it makes more sense to look at school performance annually, and look at average performance over a set number of years, much like the current system does in some accountability measures. Parents, school leaders, and teachers deserve to know how well a school is doing more often than once every three years. Parents serve as the ultimate method of accountability for schools and we are limiting their ability to exercise their school choice rights and decisions by deliberately restricting the amount of information we share about a school.

We prefer and aspire to a system that provides consistent, annual feedback to parents, teachers and school leaders.

Additionally, the waiver does little to solidify the accountability measures schools will be subject to. The first year that the proposed system takes full affect is 2017-18, the same year that the proposed waiver expires. Historical evidence is clear that when the new waiver process comes up, we will again have new measures, systems or methodologies, and our annual measurable outcomes will be pushed further down the road. Not only will these measures most certainly change in the next 3-5 years, the tests could change, the cut offs will be adapted, and the data and longevity to include TRUE growth measures in our accountability system will be reset. Growth and innovation is important, but Michigan's children and their teachers deserve to be measured with an assessment system that they can depend on, that isn't changing constantly.

We prefer and aspire to an accountability system that is static and the metrics and cut scores don't change on a regular basis so schools know what they need to do to achieve.

Speaking of growth measures, I would like to commend both the Department and others around the country for looking for valid, reliable and understandable ways to measure student growth during assessment upheaval. The proposed student growth percentiles are a valid option for

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now, and are recommended as one way to address the gap in availability of student data from the same test for consecutive years. However, student growth percentiles do not measure actual student growth by student, but rather they rank students growth against one another based on their expected vs. actual growth. In the interim, student growth percentiles can serve a purpose, especially when bridging the gap between multiple assessments. We do hope that before the waiver expires, Michigan has settled into an assessment that accurately measures growth. We would hope that when this happens, we have language in our waiver that allows us to make a shift to true growth measures. In the meantime, charter schools, along with their authorizers are true leaders in the early adoption of authentic, nationally normed interim assessments. While as a state we muddle through multiple iterations of assessments as we try to find the “perfect” system, nearly 100% of charter schools in Michigan have figured out, on their own, how to measure student growth and make positive, impactful changes in their instruction as a result.

We aspire to a system that reflects true student growth AND achievement for all students, in all types of public schools.

I cannot stress enough that it is MAPSA’s belief that the complexity of the system has been a detriment for all those involved. For teachers who need reliable, timely and useable assessment results for their students. For school leaders who constantly struggle to hit the accountability moving target, and can’t replicate their own scores due to their complexity. And for parents who are still left with multiple, convoluted measures by which to assess a school’s quality. But mostly for students, who are being churned through a changing system for at least the next 3-4 years.

We aspire to a system that will give us the ability to identify who amongst them are struggling and who are soaring.

Michigan's Current Accountability System

